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SUBJECT: RALLYING SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTION IN KARBALA AND NAJAF

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Shia Coalition members Ali al-Dabagh and Mona Zalzalā traveled with PolOff to Karbala and Najaf on 9/22 to rally support for the draft constitution. Their comments were sometimes critical of elements of the text, but they nevertheless supported ratification. We sense the Shia heartland will vote for the constitution despite what even its supporters acknowledge are shortcomings. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Ali al-Dabagh argued that the constitution would protect all Iraqi citizens and would ensure that Iraq no longer has any more dictators. He said it would give power to the people. Dabagh said that the constitution would also help ensure the equal distribution of resources and would stress Iraq's Arab identity, two issues opposed by the Kurds. He added that, while Iraq was probably not ready for federalism, the Iraqi people must nevertheless determine if they could make such a system work.

3. (SBU) Mona Zalzalā also supported the constitution, saying that it would help guarantee the equal distribution of resources. She called for the involvement of Grand Ayatollah Sistani to help determine how to distribute Iraq's resources equally. Zalzalā then went on to argue in favor of more rights for women. She said the constitution did not give women all the rights they asked for. She also stated that women should make up 50 percent of the new Iraqi Parliament. Quoting Iman Ali, she said, "One good woman is better than 1,000 bad men."

4. (C) Comment: Our sense from political figures who travel to the Shia heartland and from polls taken in that area is that the draft referendum will pass easily. It is interesting that in these presentations, these Shia parliamentarians pointed to faults in the draft constitution but said it was the best that could be achieved under Iraq's circumstances. This is a position that few Sunni Arabs publicly are willing to take. Khalilzad